AN

EARNEST ADDRESS

to the

PREACHERS ASSEMBLED IN CONFERENCE,

by

their affectionate Brethren in the Gospel,

PAUL & SILAS.

1796

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AN EARNEST ADDRESS, &c.

Conscious of the purity of our intention, and of our sincere desire to promote the glory of God, in the prosperity of Methodism, we have considered it our duty, to present you with these lines. To have a fair candid description of the subjects we have considered, appeared to us, exceedingly necessary, on the present important occasion. As the Conference will be *constrained* to investigate these subjects, and adopt such measures as a majority of the Preachers judge most expedient, we only desire an impartial examination of what we have advanced, and for every Preacher to judge for himself upon these subjects.

The Letters which have been lately circulated through our Connection, lay very much *stress* upon the decisions of former Conferences; and are earnest for a strict adherence to them. In consequence of this, we shall entreat your patience a little, while we briefly consider the different decrees which have been made by the Preachers, since the death of our venerable Father, Mr. Wesley.

When the Societies in the three kingdoms, and thousands of every denomination, were anxious to know what steps the Conference would take, four years ago, they were relieved from their perplexity, by a decree which was passed in that solemn assembly. It was soon circulated throughout the nations, *that the Methodist Preachers were determined to take up the Plan just as Mr. Wesley had left it, and order their steps accordingly.* This gave general satisfaction, and was a means of frustrating the designs of those, who wished to divide and devour us.

What was the Plan which Mr. Wesley left us at his death? This question we shall endeavour to answer immediately.

It has been lately proved, that Mr. Wesley confessed he had no fixed Plan, but varied his steps according to the leadings of Divine Providence. He altered his first Plan when he was banished from the national church, and preached in unconsecrated places. When the harvest was too great for his labours, and the clergy would not come out to his help, he altered his Plan again, and employed laymen to preach the gospel. He enlarged his Plan, when he allowed many places to worship in church-hours, and some of our people to have Baptism and the Lord's Supper administered among them. He altered it again, when he gave his consent that the Methodists in Scotland should *openly* and *avowedly* leave the national church, and become dissenters by profession. His ordaining Preachers to perform all the offices of the ministry, and appointing them to wear gowns and bands, sufficiently proved, that he wished to become all things to all men. He also admitted of our Societies on the vast continent of America, to leave the national church, and become dissenters in "body, soul, and spirit." When Dr. Coke took the virtue of his hands, as bishop to that part of the world, accompanied with several ordained brethren, Mr. Asbury was soon made deacon, priest, and bishop; who, together with the Dr. ordained elders for the different circuits. Was not this a farther proof, that our venerable Father wished to promote the interests of Methodism in every thing? His ordaining Messrs. Mather and Rankin to be bishops in England, and several Preachers to be presbyters, some time before his demise, was another alteration of his Plan. Before his death, a great number of places had service in church-hours, and several of them, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, regularly administered in them. His ordaining Mr. Woodhouse, of Ouston, near Epworth, and appointing him to preach in his gown and bands, in church-hours, and also to administer the Sacrament, although he was only a local Preacher, was a farther proof of his liberality. For some time before his death, he suffered Mr. Hanby to administer the Ordinances in the circuits where he laboured. What he published to the world, and what he declared to his friends, in justification of his conduct, sufficiently proved, that, however some zealous advocates for the church might clamour, he was resolved to act continually as *the openings* of Providence should direct.

When the Preachers in Manchester Conference agreed

to take up the Plan just as he left it, and to follow it strictly, they solemnly pledged themselves to our Societies, and to the nations at large, to engage in accomplishing the following particulars. 1. To ordain, by the imposition of hands, deacons, priests, and bishops, if they supposed it to be for the glory of God, and the good of the people. 2. That these men should wear gowns and bands in their office, if it were judged necessary. 3. That service in church-hours, and the ordinances should be introduced into those places, where the Conference thought they would be useful. 4. That whole Societies, or *even nations*, should make a public and an avowed separation from national churches, whenever the good of the people required it. 5. And lastly, that the Conference would justify its conduct, from the charges of the clamorous, in the Arminian Magazine, and by conversation. We appeal to *your consciences*, and to all the world, whether you did not solemnly engage to accomplish these things or not? What has caused divisions and contentions since that Conference? Has it been a strict attention to Mr. Wesley's Plan, or a conduct quite contrary to it?

The first year after Mr. Wesley's death, several Preachers were ordained, and the Sacrament administered with success in many places. Both these were strictly according to Mr. Wesley's Plan, and the Manchester Declaration. It was only *the mode* of them that was condemnable. It was the Conference, in the place of Mr. Wesley, that should have taken these steps. And the brethren who were ordained, and administered the Sacrament, were only to blame (if they were to blame at all) for taking those steps without being appointed to them by the Conference.

Did the London Conference keep the solemn promise they had made the year before in Manchester? Several large places petitioned for service in church-hours, and for the Sacrament. There was no just cause for rejecting their petitions. Did the Conference follow Mr. Wesley's Plan in rejecting their requests, and refusing to ordain any of their brethren? Instead of submitting to the openings of Providence, a violent debate took place, which on one side was calculated to subvert liberty of conscience. The way was amazingly plain before all, who would allow themselves time to think on the subject. Mr. Wesley's Plan directed, for Nottingham, and many other places, to be supplied according to the desire of their

heart. A number of the Preachers opposed this most excellent way. After much wrangling and debate, God Almighty suffered the Conference to enter into a temptation, which will disgrace Methodism to the end of the world. Satan, by Peter, tempted our Blessed Redeemer, but he saw the snare, and shunned it. One of the best men we have in our connexion, out of a zeal for peace, tempted the Conference to decide by lot, what was self evident. Lots ought never to be used, but where it is impossible to decide without them. The Conference yielded to temptation, and proposed for God Almighty to determine, whether the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ should have the Sacrament among themselves, or be driven to seek it with the world, in their places of worship. It was, however, proposed to the Deity, *only to determine this for one year, and that London should be excepted.* If this was not tempting God, we cannot tell what is! Our minds are filled with horror while we name the subject. We pray from our heart, Lord, "lead us not into temptation."

When the house divided to know whether the matter should be dicided this way or not, a number of the Preachers would not vote either way. Mr. Isaac Brown ran out of the house crying shame on his Brethren. It was only carried by a feeble Majority. And many of that Majority were led *hastily* into this temptation, and soon repented of their folly. The lot came out against the Sacrament *for one year.* And the following declaration, contrary to the truth, which was opposed when it was read, was published in our minutes. "All were satisfied. All submitted. Every countenance seemed to testify that every heart said, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Very many of the Preachers that were then present, know in their heart that this declaration is not true.

Many evils attended this decision. 1. It was tempting God to make some new revelation of his will, when his word is explicit on this subject. 2. It not only opposed the Scriptures, and Mr. Wesley's Plan, but common sense itself. 3. It greatly wounded and distressed many of the Preachers in the Conference. 4. It led to the publishing the above untruth to our Societies and the world. 5. It greatly grieved and hurt thousands of our most sensible and pious friends throughout the Connection. 6. It caused the Dissenters of every denomination,

as well as Church-men, to reproach us. 7. It stands as a monument of our *weakness* and *inconsistency*, in the records of Methodism.

Yet in one of the reconciling letters, though that lot was *only for one year*, the authors avail themselves of that absurd decision, and complain, that it did not satisfy, or finally determine the business. If the Lord had suffered our minds to have been blinded by the god of this world, we might have been satisfied. But many of us in a few moments were roused out of our sleep, and have repented of this rash foolish decision ever since.

Whatever disputes or contentions happened that year, they may be traced up to this lot. And to suppose that that decision was divine, is what many cannot think of without shame and confusion of face.

Were the decrees of the Leeds Conference exactly conformable to the Manchester declaration? Let us examine them a little. A passage out of each of the letters, will enable us to form our judgment in this enquiry.

"The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall not be ad-
"ministered by the Preachers in any part of the Connec-
"tion, except where the whole Society is unanimous for
"it, and *will not be content without it*; and even in those
"few exempt Societies, it shall be administered, as far as
"practicable, in the evening, and according to the form of
"the Church of England.—We are determined, as a body,
"to remain in connection with the Church of England, and
"again advise you, to be satisfied with this simple Plan
"of Methodism, which has been so wonderfully blessed
"of the Lord."

Mr. Wesley's Plan, and the Manchester declaration, according to our judgment, were both invaded, or set aside, by the Leeds Conference, in the following particulars. 1. In the minute, which required laying aside gowns and bands; especially, if this was designed to affect Scotland, and the West Indies. Mr. Wesley's Plan allowed them in those places, and at Ouston, as we have already named. 2. In declaring every Preacher in full Connection ordained, and qualified to administer the Ordinances any where. Mr. Wesley's Plan did not admit of any person administering the Sacrament in Scotland, or the West Indies, without being first ordained by the imposition of hands. 3. Nor did that Plan require all the Societies, that received the Sacrament, to be unanimous, in the sense the Leeds letters mention. However right laying aside

gowns, bands, and ordination by the imposition of hands may be, these steps are contrary to the Plan of Mr. Wesley, and contrary to the Manchester declaration.

The following reflections upon those letters appear so just, that we cannot suppose any candid person will object to them. 1. It appears amazingly strange for a Methodist Conference to declare, "as a body, they will remain in connection with the Church of England," when the Preachers all know that we are absolutely dissenters. At least, *in every sense of the word*, the Preachers themselves are dissenters in the sight of God, and before all who know the laws of our land. If a few private members make such a declaration, let them enjoy their prejudices, till divine light expel them from their minds; but two hundred ministers of Christ should have more respect to their character, and the work they are engaged in, than to declare they are united with the Church of England, when they are assured, beyond a doubt, of their being dissenters.

2. Is it not strange, that upwards of two hundred ministers of Christ, strive to satisfy our Congregations and Societies, while they are living in the omission of a duty, which is required by Jesus Christ; or to engage in it in a manner that is a reproach to Christianity? It is well known, that in many large towns where the Sacrament is not given in our chapels, a great number of our people never communicate any where. And those who receive it in the Church, generally do it from the hands of ministers who are forbidden to preach by the Lord Jesus; and with persons who eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body. Are you justified before God, in obliging thousands of our people to live in the omission of such a sacred duty, or in driving them to places where they have no right to communicate?

3. While you profess yourseves "friends to all, and enemies to none," can you continue a decree that subverts liberty of conscience, and greatly injures your followers? You forbid any place to have the Sacrament, "but where the whole Society are unanimous, and *will not be content without it.*" You encourage a whole Society to live in the neglect of duty, provided they can content their minds in such a neglect. 2. You put receiving the Sacrament upon an impossible condition to most places, where very great majorities of our people are for it. According to the letter of this decree, if an old woman

object to it in a Society of a thousand members, they cannot have it. Your decree *obliges you* to reject the entreaties of nine hundred and ninety-nine of your friends, and *forces you* to yield to the voice of an individual. 3. This decree, which excludes liberty of conscience, and is exceedingly contrary to the happiness of your followers, is referred to in one of the reconciling letters, and we are entreated to guide our steps according to its import. If decrees are continued with us, that invade the rights of our glorious living Head, and the rights of conscience, we shall incur the displeasure of God, and expose ourselves to his wrath. He will give us up to strong delusions, to believe a lie, if we are determined that the truth shall not be held in righteousness. Let us prevent this, by allowing every person to act in our Connection, in matters of this nature, as they are persuaded will be most for the glory of God.

Can it be supposed that the Preachers every where acted according to the letter of this decree? Did they suffer a few individuals in different places, to prevent hundreds of our people from enjoying their lawful privileges? And can we suppose they acted contrary to God, in their attempts to feed the flock of Christ committed to their care? Yet they are accused by many Trustees and others, as having acted contrary to the decrees of the Conference; and by the letter of those decrees they are found guilty. If you first make rules that cannot conscientiously be kept, and then suffer yourselves to be reproached for not attending to them, this is not suffering for the sake of Christ, but on account of your unwillingness to follow the revealed will of God. Bury, below the centre of the earth, every decree which invades the rights of our Divine Master, and the rights of conscience; and forbid any mourning on account of their funeral.

The decrees of last Conference are a little better than those we have been just examining. The four first particulars in the letter, however, are contrary to that liberty of conscience, which might have been expected from such a respectable assembly. The first is against the Manchester declaration, as well as Mr. Wesley's Plan. Preaching in the most suitable hours of the Sabbath, may be supported by "special reasons," in every place. The whole sabbath is the Lord's. Between ten in the morning, and six in the evening, are the best hours for public

worship in the day. Especially for those persons who are infirm, and others who have families under their care. 2. It is our duty, in those hours to worship God in that way, we believe will be most for his glory. Very many of our people spend those hours in idle chit-chat, or in other things equally against the interests of their soul. One-half of those who stickle for the Church, hardly ever attend upon her worship. 3. Preaching and the Sacrament in those hours in our Chapels, would be a more acceptable service before God, than for our Congregations and Societies to be scattered, and in many places the Preachers doing little or nothing. 4. Instead of being driven to unsuitable hours and places of worship, as primitive Christians were, the laws of our country authorize our worshipping where and when we please. 5. Very many of our most serious and best friends desire us to allow them to worship in our Chapels in those hours. 6. No person can bring a reasonable objection, or one text of Scripture against this privilege. 7. It would be for the glory of God, our own comfort as a people, and the honour of our Connection in the world. These reasons ought to outweigh ignorance, pride, bigotry, superstition, party spirit, lording it over the consciences of our brethren, and conformity to the national church, *which is the world.* If any persons would separate from us on account of this liberty, they cannot be friends to the Lord Jesus, and the doctrines taught by the apostles.

The third and fourth rules of the Bristol Conference, though more liberal than those which were made the year before at Leeds, are by no means calculated to promote the interests of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the first part of what is declared on the Lord's Supper, would require proof. Have no places been favoured with the Sacrament, between the Leeds and Bristol Conferences, where an individual or more opposed? Is not the latter part of this declaration very illiberal? "The Lord's Supper shall not be administered in future, where the union and concord of the Society can be preserved without it." Is the Lord's Supper an ordinance of God? Are we commanded to do this in remembrance of Christ? Can the true ministers of Christ withhold it from their pious followers, when they request it at their hands? What can we suppose influences a majority of a Methodist Conference to decree, this ordinance shall be withheld from the greatest part of their followers? Would it not have been

more for the glory of God, to have decreed, this ordinance shall not be withheld from any of the pious and faithful, who entreat us to administer it to them? They shall either have it publicly in their Chapels, or privately with each other, till the overflowings of bigotry and superstition are brought into their proper channel.

Upon the whole, we offer the following reasons, to what have already been advanced, for a speedy abolition of the decrees we have been considering. 1. Many of them are against the plain declarations of our Blessed Redeemer, and those of his apostles. 2. They oppose that charity which thinketh no evil, and which leads us to do as we would be done by. 3. They are a lording it over the consciences of God's heritage. 4. They deprive a great number of our people, of those privileges, which belong to them as Christians. 5. By withholding their rights, endless disputes and contentions are occasioned. 6. The pious and sensible, are greatly hurt and stumbled at our inconsistency. 7. Our conduct is a reproach to the world. 8. These decrees are built upon the sand; and therefore, it is impossible they should stand against the evidence of truth. 9. If they are continued a little longer, they will be a bone of contention, will grieve the Spirit of God, and may hinder the salvation of thousands. If these reasons are properly weighed, they will be given up at once. The liberal minds of the Preachers should devise liberal things, for the happiness and prosperity of our cause.

It appears absolutely necessary to our future welfare, that Mr. Wesley's Plan should be strictly attended to; and that the Manchester declaration should be kept sacred. If we remember from whence we are fallen, and repent, and do our first works, the Lord may bless us abundantly, and we may behold his glory in the face of Jesus, shining upon us more than ever. But if we resolve to act contrary to his will, we may force him to remove his candlestick from among us. God grant us grace, that we may cheerfully submit to him in all things, and daily strive together for the faith of the gospel, that our latter end may be more glorious than our beginning!

While Mr. Wesley was at the helm of our affairs, every thing was conducted according to the counsel of his will; but when it pleased God to call him to rest in Abraham's bosom, it became necessary to adopt a new Plan of government in our churches. The Lord is wise in all his

ways, and holy in all his works. His wisdom appeared in calling our aged Father to rest at the time he did. As this happened early in the month of March, the Preachers had time to think upon the most excellent form of government, before they met in Conference. It pleased God to incline several of our most respectable brethren to meet in Halifax, and to adopt such measures as were eminently calculated for the welfare of our cause. They proposed for the kingdoms to be divided into districts, and for the districts to meet previous to the meeting of the Conference, to consult on the most important matters relative to our cause. The outlines of a Plan for our future movements were suggested, and every thing put into a proper channel for investigation. Most of the leading Preachers met, according to the desire of that letter, and freely debated on the subjects which were proposed for their consideration. This had a blessed influence upon their minds, and led them to propose their sentiments with the greatest freedom and love.

When the Conference met, our Lord's words were strictly attended to. Call no man your master on earth, for one is your master, even Christ, and ye all are brethren. Liberty and equality seemed to be the order of the day. This was manifest in the following particulars. 1. It was decreed in that Conference, that the person chosen president, should have no other power in the chair than a casting vote; and, that as soon as the meeting was ended, he should immediately descend into his former place, and not act in the future but as the rest of his brethren. It was also established in that Conference, that the same person should not be chosen president a second time, till several years had elapsed. There was a godly jealousy in the hearts of the Preachers against any man, or any number of men, being raised to places where they would have undue power or influence. 2. It was appointed in the same Conference, that the districts should have no chairman elected till the time of their meeting; and that the chairman should be exactly on the same footing with the president of the Conference. This was designed to prevent any person from being raised to any place of distinction above his brethren by office. Messrs. Thompson and Bradburn, with a number of other respectable brethren, were exceedingly earnest in this glorious work; and had the happiness of seeing their labours crowned with success.

This Plan being adopted, made us a pure republic. We could say with joy, we have no king in our Israel, but the Lord Jesus. While the ministers of the Church of Rome are ever grasping after places and power, we were anxious that no place or power should raise us one above another. If the ministers of national churches strive to rise above each other, by office and outward influence, our emulation was, *to be equal—to be brethren in Christ Jesus.* Nothing can be more glorious than our constitution as it was then established. 1. It made every Preacher equal in the great work of the gospel. 2. It opened a way for the most respectable men in our Connection, to be chairmen in the meeting of districts, and presidents in the Conference. As these places could not be occupied by the same persons for several years, after they had been employed in them, it opened a door for the most useful men among us, to come forward in the management of our affairs. 3. It was calculated to expel aspiring views from any individual, and to prevent the influence of any temptations affecting those, who might have been entangled, if a less excellent Plan had been adopted. 4. It created a holy emulation among the Preachers, to be useful in their different places. Because it was by real merit and usefulness that any person could rise to those places we have named, which had nothing connected with them of temporal advantage. 5. Our people were fully satisfied in this excellent Plan, and blessed God for leading us into such a glorious way. 6. It was calculated to be of infinite service to our cause at large. Our Leaders and Societies imbibed the same spirit in many places, and every thing proclaimed the Plan was of God.

This Plan was first invaded, by chairmen for the districts being appointed at the Conference. Perhaps the appointment itself was justifiable, as it was designed for the welfare of our Societies. The chairmen, being known, they had a head to apply to, in any case that was of a critical nature. But the manner of appointing them, destroys that liberty and equality, which were at first so carefully guarded. Many of the districts have but few Preachers at the Conferences, and in consequence of this, those who are chosen chairmen of the districts, however worthy they may be of their office, as they are not fairly elected by their brethren, it is a grievance which makes them complain, and which they wish may be soon redressed.

It was farther invaded, when the same person was allowed to be re-elected, without being out of office any years before his re-election. How far this is contrary to that liberty which the nature of religion requires, we shall not determine: but the Preachers at first supposed it necessary to establish that equality, which they imagined essential to our welfare.

Districts are adequate to every thing that can possibly happen between the Conferences. If a suitable number of delegates from the people were admitted into them, every thing that could not be fully adjusted, might lie peaceably over to the next Conference. There cannot be any power wanting on the side of the Preachers, which they do not possess. And if there be a district where the Preachers have not been adequate to their work, this may be remedied in future. In cases of very great importance, were as many delegates to be appointed by the people, as there are preachers in the district, this would terminate most of our disputes at once. And those that could not be settled there, might be carried with such forwardness to the Conference, as would make it possible for them to be speedily adjusted.

If the Preachers would appoint such an equitable Plan, both parties might be bound to go on peaceably till the Conference, if they could not adjust their matters in a district meeting.

If this method had been pursued at Bristol, every thing would have been established to the peace of our Connection, till this Conference. The district adopted such measures, as the necessity of the case seemed to require. Messrs. Benson, and Co. threw off the authority of the district meeting, and followed the way which they judged most advisable. Instead of destroying or weakening the authority of district meetings, make them respectable, by causing them to be a proper medium between us and our people. Only allow the different circuits to elect and send delegates to our district meetings, and let every thing be transacted fairly and openly before them, then all parties will be satisfied, and God will dwell among us.

The Letter and Pamphlet published by Mr. Longridge, is the language of the most sensible and pious of our friends, through the whole Connection. If Leaders, quarterly, and district meetings are conducted in an open, candid, and honourable way, we shall soon be as a city at unity with itself;

and all who see us will take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus.

There are several reasons why many of our Preachers wish to lay aside district meetings. 1. Because they cannot rise to that power and consequence which they wish for, while they exist. 2. It often happens, that the persons they consider as greatly their inferiors, are preferred before them, in those meetings, and this is truly mortifying. 3. There are often too open and candid examinations upon different subjects, which were formerly carried a good deal by their influence. 4. Many persons, that have been in the habit of having the best circuits, were districts continued, might be brought to share with their brethren, in situations that are not very agreeable. 5. And lastly, they cannot bear the thought of that *heavenly* equality, which is likely every where to prevail, if they are continued.

But there are more weighty reasons for their continuance and enlargement, which we shall immediately adduce, 1. They are eminently calculated to be of the greatest benefit to our Connection: especially if they are put upon a larger scale. 2. Every subject belonging to Methodism can be fully examined, and amply discussed in them. 3. Many things can be examined on the spot, and such steps taken, as it would be impossible to take, had we no district meetings. 4. They bring the Preachers acquainted with each other, and tend very much to promote brotherly love. By attending them in the fear of God, a blessed union takes place, which encreases with our days. 5. A number of subjects are considered in them, and prepared for the Conference. 6. Many of our brethren are encouraged to speak their minds freely in them, which prepares them for speaking in the public Conference. This throws the business into the hands of all, and makes all interested in it. Before they were established, most of the Preachers were like ciphers in the Conference. 7. They are particularly calculated to be a proper medium, in which the people, by their delegates, may meet us; and by which we and they may be properly united. 8. They are likely to save a good deal of expence to the Conference, if they be conducted in future on the most eligible terms. 9. Lastly, it appears to be the will of a very great majority of the Preachers in full Connection, that they should be continued.

Whatever motive could excite any of our brethren to

propose a Plan for bishops to be introduced among us at the Litchfield meeting, we are happy in observing, that our people in general, and almost all our Preachers, exceedingly execrate it. Last year the cry was so very loud against it, that, at the Conference, none of the Preachers who composed the Litchfield meeting, offered to bring it forward in the Conference. Messrs. Thompson and Benson, were particularly zealous in seeking to prevent such an evil. Hardly a hint was given by any of its advocates in private upon it. The matter was buried, and there was a general rejoicing at the funeral.

But since the late disputes at Bristol, we are sorry to find, that this subject is revived, and the very men who were its chief opponents, are now pleading in its favour. Because the Bristol district meeting reprobated the steps of Mr. Benson and his colleagues, and did not sufficiently respect the advice of others that gave it unasked, it appears they have joined their influence together, and are wishing for bishops, or some other order of men to reign over us.

Several leading men on both sides of the late disputes have entered into this scheme, and seem determined to push it at this Conference. They have entertained an idea, that the district meetings are inadequate for our work, and wish to have some head, or heads to apply to. We are *gravely* told there must be some head, otherwise we cannot stand our ground. But it is feared by many, that the real cause of this outcry is, that a few individuals may rule over us. It appears amazingly strange, that some men should seem unhappy, because they have not the reigns of government in their hands And what makes this more affecting is, that several of those men are almost worn out in their work, and appear to be in a situation, in which they should prepare rather to live with Christ in heaven, than reign over his people on earth. To have seven, or any other number of Bishops, or Popes, elected and set up every year, would be a curious farce. They might shine to the ignorant and unthinking in their station, but all who are enlightened sufficiently to examine matters properly, would consider them as a curse from the Lord, instead of a blessing.

We repeat it again, the districts are, or easily may be made every way adequate to the businesses which are to be transacted between the Conferences. We have no need of any other rulers than chairmen, properly elected, to regulate our matters. Appeals to one or more of the

bishops, would amazingly clog the wheels of Methodism, and be attended with inconceivable evils. Nothing can be said too strong to execrate a Plan of this nature. Every attempt to introduce it, should be resisted, as our Lord resisted the Devil in the wilderness. All who are friends to our people, and friends to the interests of our cause at large, will zealously oppose a measure of this nature. God grant, that our brethren who have this in their minds, may be delivered from the influence of temptation, and not lay snares before us, least they should be grieved, while we spurn them with indignation! May his grace so far operate on all our hearts, that we may continue brethren, and be subject to Christ in all things!

After a free and full investigation has taken place upon the Lord's Supper, and service in church-hours, we are fully persuaded, the Conference will see the propriety of allowing the majority of every Society to determine in these matters. Mr. Longridge has placed this subject in a beautiful light, and shown, that no number of Trustees ought to prevent a majority of a Society from worshipping God in their own Chapels, as they please. If any Trustees, that are unwilling for this liberty to prevail, be indemnified in their Trust, they cannot have any just cause to complain. Property has not been mentioned by the Newcastle and Bristol Trustees. They could not make this a plea, but have acted, according to their declarations, to preserve "the old Plan and primitive Methodism." The Conference had better allow the people this privilege freely, as have it extorted from them. It is impossible to withhold it, unless we are determined to lord it over the consciences of God's heritage. Let the Trustees be treated with all possible respect, but give them assurance, that they shall not hinder the people from worshipping God, at the times and in the manner they think most for his glory.

As those who wish for the Sacrament to be administered in our Chapels, do not in the least desire to compel their brethren, who differ from them in sentiment, into their measures, but cheerfully admit of their going to the Church, as formerly, we think that the minority of any Society should be provided for, who wish for the Sacrament. This has been hinted at by several of our brethren, and proved to be a privilege they ought to enjoy, by our worthy friend, Mr. Longridge. If the majority of the Society will not allow them to have this liberty in

their Chapels, they can be provided for in other places. This might be done with the greatest peace and harmony, if it was only once established by the Conference. It might look a little strange to those who have not had a perfect knowledge of our late disputes; and it might be attended with some disputes between the two parties; but while they acted with christian affection towards each other, every thing would be carried on in the fear of God, and for the happiness of all our friends.

Whatever laws are made to restrict Preachers or People from speaking upon the subjects in dispute among us, will only sharpen the minds of the different opponents to severer conflicts. If any laws are made on this subject, they should be, to regulate disputes to the glory of God, and the happiness of those who contend. It is generally supposed, all who wish to restrain freedom of debate, have a bad cause in hand, which will be exposed and ruined, if this be tolerated. When the liberty of the press is restricted in any nation, is not this accomplished by those, who are afraid of their measures being properly stated before the people? Every one that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that it may be manifest, that his works are wrought in God.

If any laws were enacted by us to prevent freedom of debate upon the doctrines we think essential to salvation, should we not think ourselves injured by such laws? And shall we enact any rules to prevent our Preachers and People peaceably conversing upon the subjects which are now agitated? We believe there is not a person that pleads for the liberties of our People, that would wish to prevent a fair open investigation of these matters. Let a Preacher, or any other person peaceably, by conversation, by preaching, and by the circulation of pamphlets, maintain the truth, and give a reason of the hope that is in him. Though we think this subject should be kept out of the pulpit as much as possible, yet we are fully persuaded, every Preacher and private Member, in our Connection, have a right to communicate their sentiments freely to each other. For the Methodist Conference to make laws to restrain freedom of debate, and the liberty of the press, would be such a stain on their character, as would never be removed. There is not a man would wish to do this, but those that are for preventing our People from having liberty of conscience. The language of the other party is, Let us prove all things, and

only hold fast that which is good. Let us bring the subjects in dispute to the law and the testimony; if they agree with these, let us hold them sacred; if they do not, let us give them up in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It is very singular, that sensible persons, both Preachers and private members in our Connection, should be so desirous of being called members of the Established Church. After all that has been said to prove that we are dissenters, in the sight of God, and before all who know the laws of our country, many still maintain we belong to the national church. If we value the truth, let us publish no more declarations on this subject to the world. The cause of Jesus Christ can be supported without making false declarations to the people. He is a God of truth, and by him actions are weighed. He loves truth in the inward parts, and cannot look with approbation upon any thing that is contrary to it. If a few Trustees and others, please themselves with the name of church people, let us consider our character, and not be ashamed of the honourable company of dissenters, who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. As we all act in the character of dissenting ministers, and many of us are licensed as such, let us cheerfully go without the camp, bearing the reproach of Christ.

If we consider the corrupt state of all national churches, and especially our own, we shall be ashamed of owning her ministers and followers for brethren. And if we reflect on what God has done to other national churches, and what he is doing, we shall rather own the righteousness of his judgments, than be zealous to support the interests of those which remain. We all know, that Popery in all its branches must be removed, before the light of the glorious gospel can shine universally. National churches must be brought even with the ground, before the truth as it is in Jesus can prevail extensively. Does not the Lord our God call us to come out of Babylon, that we may not share in her plagues and judgments? Ought we not to hear his voice, and separate from this untoward generation? If the national church and the world be one, ought we not to come out from among the ungodly, and be separate, and touch not their unclean things, that the Lord may receive us? Let us behold the signs of the times, and act accordingly. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; while the simple pass on, and are punished. We entreat you, dear breth-

ren, not to spurn with indignation what we have said on this subject. We have spoken freely, and have done this in the simplicity and sincerity of our heart before God. And we call upon you in the name of the Lord Jesus, to weigh these matters maturely, that the judgments of God may not rest upon us as a people. May the Father of our mercies guide and influence us by his Holy Spirit, that we may act according to the counsel of his blessed will, and be screened from every thing that would oppress us! May he soften, and melt, and change all our hearts, that we may wisely pursue the way which he opens before us, and be continually happy in his salvation! And may he direct our feeble bark, in the midst of the storms and tempests which beat on every side, that we may be brought to the haven where we would be!

Before we conclude, we beg leave to observe, that it has often given pain to many of the brethren, to hear such long and loud debates, on our discussing subjects in the time of Conference; which, had we something of a rule to go by, might in a great measure be prevented: we therefore conceive, with all deference, that was there a clearer definition given of Conference, its officers, and members; their duties, and privileges, it might be a mean of information to the younger brethren; be conducive to their future usefulness; prevent much altercation and useless debate; and tend to facilitate the business of the assembly in its meetings.

The following is humbly proposed as a specimen. 1. The Conference. 2. The President. 3. Members, and their privileges. 4. On Debate.

First, Conference. Conference, as defined by the *Deed*, is understood to possess inherent power. 1. To make laws for the whole body. 2. To examine, censure, mulct, or expel its own members, as in cases provided, and necessity requires.

Second, President. The president is to be chosen as the Deed describes, viz. 1. One of the hundred. 2. Chosen by the hundred. 3. To have two votes. 4. To continue till another is chosen. Thus far the Deed; but further respecting him. 5. Is not to be chosen again in less than eight years time. 6. To propose every motion in form, and determine what is before the house. 7. To be always addrest. 8. To command silence, and call to order, if there is any necessity. 9. Set a member right, if wrong. 10. To stop a brother, if he is refractory to him, or uses any abusive language to any of the body. The

president, at the same time, shall have the support of the brethren, till the sense of the house be taken respecting the aggressor. 11. Is never, whilst in the chair, to speak decidedly in favour of, or against a motion, &c. but is to be considered as purely disinterested either way. 12. To take the sense of the house, when enough has been said upon the subject. The sense of the house herein shall be always understood, when the question or motion is generally called for. 13. Is never to leave the chair empty. 14. Is amenable to Conference for his conduct, and if he is negligent of his duty, or abuses a brother, the former president shall take the chair, if necessary, till he gives an account of his conduct, and the sense of the house be taken. If he is acquitted, he shall take the chair again honourably; if not, a new president shall be chosen. 15. If by affliction, sickness, &c. he is rendered incapable of attending his business, a new president to be chosen, till the former is recovered, but no longer.

Third, The members, and their privileges. 1. All are considered members, who are present at Conference, and are fully received; provided there be always forty, at least, of the hundred present, whenever any motion is considered and determined. 2. Every member has a right to propose a motion, &c. on doctrine, discipline, or any other matter tending for the general or particular good of the whole, or any of the body; or say any thing on any motion he pleases, as in cases provided. 3. No member shall be publicly criminated, less or more, by any brother, until the accuser and accused have discussed the matter between themselves. 4. No complaints heard at Conference against any member, but through the medium of the district meeting, unless it can be proved, that the brethren there would not hear the accuser, &c. but if so, the chairman of that district must be called to give his reasons for such conduct. 5. The members may call a brother to order, if exceeding due bounds.

Fourth, On debate. 1. Every motion and subject shall be properly introduced, and then seconded by a member, before it becomes an object for the attention of the house; and if not seconded, it falls to the ground. 2. Any member may say what he thinks right on the propriety or impropriety of a motion made, propose an amendment, &c. before he or any second the motion. The proposer may may then withdraw his motion, or agree to the amendment, &c. But if the motion be once seconded, it must

be discussed, amended, or dismissed by a majority of the house only. 3. Every motion thus before the house, must be finished, before another can be brought forward, unless in cases of necessity; and on such occasions, the majority of the house to decide: at the same time, if the subject be important, the house may, by a majority, adjourn; but the time must be fixed for its further discussion that Conference, or it falls to the ground. 4. If a motion be negatived, or dismissed, it cannot come before the house again that Conference. 5. On examination of characters, or any motion made with regard to a member, all strangers, and the party concerned, to withdraw. 6. If any thing of importance is to be discussed, then all strangers, and the brethren on trial to withdraw, or retire, so as to take no active part in the debate. 7. If two of the brethren rise to speak at one time, the senior brother to speak first; or if that be dubious, the president shall determine, only the other shall have leave to speak immediately after. 8. Every member shall have liberty to speak what he judges proper on the subject in hand, without interruption, but in cases provided; and no member shall speak twice, except it be to explain, or exculpate himself, and to that only he shall attend, or be considered disorderly. 9. A secretary chosen every year, and his power to end with the Conference.

Lastly. A word or two respecting *ordination*. To form a church with ordinances, without a form of ordination, is, in our opinion, giving up the Bible, and Bible discipline. And if *you*, Brethren, fritter away Scripture, and its institutions, what will the *world* say? *Good men* say? *God* himself say? We think we hear Jesus Christ declaring, *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.* Bring this home to the point in hand, for in our judgment it is applicable. For 1. It is there commanded that *all things be done decently and in order.* 2. Our Lord ordained. Mar. iii. 14. 3. The apostles ordained. Acts i. 22, 26. 4. We have the manner set forth there also, and instructions given respecting proper and improper objects. 1 Tim. iv. 14. v. 22. iii. 1 to 8. Tit. i. 5 to 10. We further add, 5. The most pure churches in the purest times, ordained. 6. Mr. Wesley ordained; and as is said of his Master, so we may in a sense say of him, *he hath left us an example*, &c. 7. Many

of the people prefer it. 8. It is consistent with the OLD PLAN!!!

Choose what *form* you please, but some form should be adopted. But it is said, *we were ordained, when received*, &c. To preach, we admit, but not to give the Ordinances of the Sacrament, &c. 1. It is notorious, that it was considered in no other point of view by any formerly. Large minutes, quest. 51 page 34, 35. 2. The brethren never held it forth in that light to the people in the beginning: nay, they had no other idea of it in any other sense *than to preach:* a few excepted. 3. The people at large had no other conception of our admission, than *simply to preach.* This *was*, and perhaps still is, the prevailing opinion among our Societies. 4. This Mr. Wesley himself thought, or why did he ordain?